



Kentucky Dept of Tourism

## **Bluegrass Heritage Museum Opens Door to the Past**

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**Contact:** Suzanne Shearer, Director of Communications  
(502) 564-4930 x145  
Suzanne.Shearer@ky.gov

### **Bluegrass Heritage Museum Opens Door to the Past**

WINCHESTER, Ky, OCT. 5, 2004. The Bluegrass Heritage Museum, a unique museum dedicated to the history of Bluegrass people and places, opens Tuesday, Oct. 12 in Winchester. Located in the former Guerrant Mission Clinic and Hospital at 217 South Main Street, the museum is the result of an ambitious community- wide effort that city officials hope will energize tourism in Clark County.

“The Bluegrass Heritage Museum is the only museum in the state dedicated to the history of a specific region,” said Nancy Turner, executive director of the Winchester-Clark County Tourism Commission. “This is an attraction Winchester has never had before, and we’re very excited about it.”

“The National Geographic called the Bluegrass region one of the top 10 places for travel in the United States, so we think there is definitely a market for tourism here,” said Kevin Osbourn, president of the museum board.

The museum is the brainchild of Mayor Dodd Dixon who broached the idea in 1999, spearheading a drive to investigate the possibility and find a location. Turner was hired as the first director in 2000, and with the help of a core group of 30 people in the community raised \$100,000. That amount was parlayed into \$500,000 in state and federal grant money. Most of those funds went into initial renovations of the building, which was donated to the city by the Edward O. Guerrant Memorial Association.

The former clinic, vacant for more than a decade, has played a major part in the region’s history and is itself an artifact. Built in the 1890s in the Romanesque revival style, complete with a turret, it was originally a residence. In the 1920s it was purchased by the Guerrant family, who converted it into a clinic and hospital that became one of the best-known health-care facilities in the eastern part of the state. The clinic closed its doors in 1989.

“Many people in this community have an association with this building,” said Jim Pitts, the museum’s executive director. “The fact that we can bring this signature building on Main Street back to life is a great accomplishment for this community.”

One of the first floor galleries is devoted to the story of the building and the generations of Guerrant doctors who practiced medicine there. Another gallery features vignettes of local history. A third is an interpretation of a Civil War site that is being developed in Clark County by the tourism commission. Other highlights include artifacts from Lower Howard's Creek, a nature preserve, and recent acquisitions such as a spinning wheel and a trophy from a 1909 baseball game. There is also a museum store on the first floor.

"We have big ambitions to renovate the second and third floors of the building then acquire the building next door as a genealogical center," Osbourn said.

The board has also done initial groundwork to make the museum an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and is optimistic about its chances, he said.

Immediate plans call for developing an active public history program and setting up a docent program, Pitts said. The museum will be staffed by volunteers and open Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. The Oct. 12 opening begins with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 a.m. and admission is free.

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**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Jim Pitts, executive director  
Bluegrass Heritage Museum  
859-745-1358  
[jpitts@bgheritage.com](mailto:jpitts@bgheritage.com)

Nancy Turner, executive director  
Winchester-Clark County Tourism Commission  
859-744-0556  
[tourism@winchesterky.com](mailto:tourism@winchesterky.com)

Department of Tourism Contact Information:  
Suzanne Shearer, Director of Communications and Travel Industry Relations  
502-564-4930  
[Suzanne.shearer@ky.gov](mailto:Suzanne.shearer@ky.gov)

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